

Brasília Palace Hotel; Alvorada Palace and Its Chapel; Ministries in construction

the modern image as producer and product of modern architecture: marcel gautherot's and mario fontenelle's documentary photographs of the construction of brasilia and their role in creating the modern image of brazil

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This paper aims to examine the photographic images taken by Marcelle Gautherot and Mario Fontenelle for the publications Brasília and Módulo, periodicals established during the construction of Brasília in the 1950s to justify the construction and to advertise the new capital of Brasília. These magazines promoted a new modern way of life and thus they served as an important documentation of the making of modern architecture in Brazil. The photographic documents published by these magazines reveal the photograph of the modern building as the main force as well as the vehicle in the production of a modern image. The representation of modern architecture was created through the photographic image that accompanied the modern discourse. Two photographers, who documented this process, Marcel Gautherot and Mario Fontenelle, created photographs of symbolic value. The modern image became a mix between photography and architecture whereas the two subjects require and benefit from one another. The photograph needs architecture to become the means of representation and architecture needs photography to sell the modern way of life. The examples of these two photographers thus make visible how the initial documentation process was used as a publicity image, becoming the work of art and finally a symbol of modernism.

keywords Modern architecture, Photography, Brazil, Brasília

introduction

This paper aims to show the connection between the photographic documentation during the construction of Brasília and its advertisement as a modern city. Two of the photographers that were tasked with documenting the construction of the new capital of Brazil, Mario Fontenelle and Marcel Gautherot are here credited with creating the now iconic images of Brasília. These photographs have since their creation not only served as documents in the making of a modern city but also as publicity images of Brazilian modern architecture; published in national magazines, as shown here, these photographs have since been used as templates for similar and almost identical images of the buildings of Brasília. The representation of modern architecture was in this sense created through the image that accompanied the modern discourse, often a photograph in black and white of a white architectural form. These photographs are highlighting the importance of 'photography as architecture' creating the image of a modern architecture and city. The aesthetic taste of the moment was created through these symbolic values of the modern image. The modern image is thus a mix between photography and architecture whereas the two subjects require and benefit from one another. Through some chosen photographic images from Brasília that have become icons of a Brazilian modern architecture, we aim to show the various concepts in which they were used in producing these images.

mario fontenelle and marcel gautherot

mario fontenelle (1919-1986)

Mario Moreira Fontenelle was the official photographer of the magazine *brasília*. Originally working as an aircraft mechanic for the then governor and later president Juscelino Kubitschek, he was given a Leica 35mm in 1956 by Kubitschek who encouraged him to take photographs. Since 1957, he then collaborated with *brasília*, the magazine published by NOVACAP, the company responsible for building the new capital of Brazil. He became their official photographer contributing images solely as pictorial documents in the process of the construction of Brasília. Inspired by Marcel Gautherot's somewhat more artistic images, Fontenelle copied several of his motives and photographs.

marcel gautherot (1910-1996)

Marcel André Felix Gautherot was born and raised in Paris where he started studying architecture, he did not graduate but rather started working as a photographer. By 1939 he had travelled through Latin America, taking photographs of Brazilian people and life. A year later he settled in Rio de Janeiro where he established relationships with artists, architects and intellectuals of the time, not the least with Oscar Niemeyer himself, who he continued to work with on several of Niemeyer's projects. From 1958 he was also documenting the construction of Brasília for Niemeyer's journal *Módulo*. Some of his photographs were also published in the magazine *brasília* and in several other national and international periodicals. Although many iconic images of Brazilian modern architecture were created by Gautherot, he was also known for his photographs of Brazilian's life in general. Although Gautherot did not work exclusively for Niemeyer or *Módulo*, he was valued by architects due to his training as an architect, which helped to create his iconic images. As he once stated: "a person who does not understand architecture is not able to take a good photograph".

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the magazines brasília and modulo

brasília (1957-1988)

The magazine *brasília* was founded in 1957 as a governmental periodical to justify and advertise the construction of the new capital for Brazil. As it was not a critical magazine and was not intended to establish a debate on architecture and urbanism, it was to become an important documentary collection of photographic images of modern architecture and urbanism by bringing together the history of the foundation of Brasília, its construction and its opening. The first edition of the magazine *brasília* began to circulate throughout the country in January 1957 as a monthly publication of the Urbanization Company of the New Capital of Brazil (NOVACAP). According to the editors, this publication was an obligation by NOVACAP to disclose and defend the modern architecture and urbanism of the new capital of Brazil to the public through monthly newsletters, which then became the magazine *brasília*. The introductory page read a message by President Kubitschek, expressing what the construction of Brasília and the change of the capital actually meant for the interests and progress of the nation. This would similarly become the statement of the magazine, which published 83 volumes between 1957 and 1988. Further to Kubitschek's statement, the magazine also included testimonials by other important politicians, architects, urban planners and intellectuals of the country defending the change of the capital as well as extensive photographic coverage, including aerial photographs, the everyday construction site of Brasília, the step by step construction process as well as the inauguration of Brasília.

modulo (1955-1965/1975-1989)

Módulo was a magazine of architecture and fine arts founded by Oscar Niemeyer in 1955. According to the editorial statement, it aimed at professionals and artists to contribute to the development of architecture and urbanism that sought to humanize modern life. As such it was also reporting on the construction of Brasília, yet not as its sole purpose. Publication of the magazine was interrupted between 1965 and 1975 and terminated finally with its 100th issue in 1989. Primarily, the magazine showed the architecture of Niemeyer and other architects of Rio de Janeiro with several articles praising their ideas and approach of modern architecture, which also included the reasoning of the construction of Brasília.

Both magazines were created in the second half of the fifties and are distinguished by their image policy and structure. *Brasília* focused on a technical discourse of the construction of the new capital; *Módulo*, through its discussion of contemporary architecture, validated the modern architecture of Brasília.

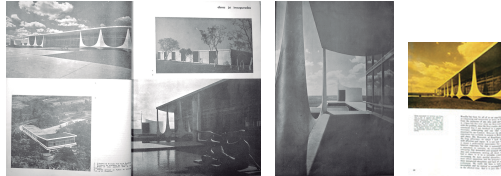
the images of mario fontenelle and marcel gautherot in brasília and modulo

The photographic images of Mario Fontenelle and Marcel Gautherot were used by both magazines on covers and articles as well as in publicity campaigns that supported the publication of the periodicals. By doing so, some of these photographs published in the magazines *brasília* and *Módulo* not only contributed to the discourse of the construction of a new capital but also became iconic images of Brazilian modern architecture and urbanism. The following few images will highlight how these photographs helped Brasília to become the emblem of the modern city as well as establishing their status as iconic images.

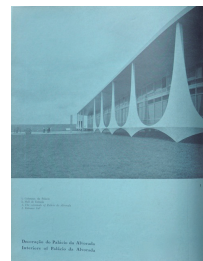
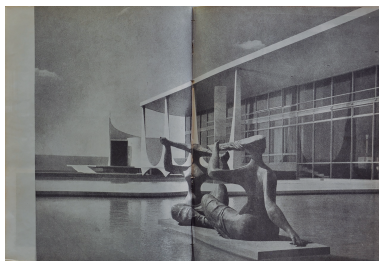
One of the most photographed building of that time was the Alvorada Palace, the residence of the president, which was also one of the first buildings completed and one of the photographs most often reproduced and copied. The magazine *brasília* published

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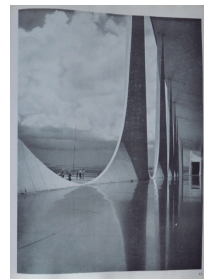
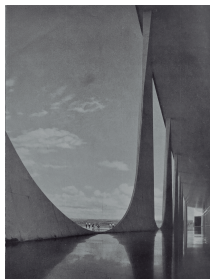
the image in November 1957 for the first time and then again in its June 1958 issue, which was a special volume dedicated to the opening of the first landmarks of Brasília, which also included the Brasília Palace Hotel, Chapel of Our Lady of Fatima, the Anapolis-Brasília Highway and the Avenue of Nations. This June 1958 issue not only announced the transfer of the capital from Rio de Janeiro to Brasília but also declared the Alvorada Palace as a “masterpiece of modern Brazilian architecture”.



f1_Alvorada Palace Hotel and Its Chapel
brasília 21, September 1958; Módulo 18, June 1960



f2_Cover brasília # 23 - Alvorada Palace
brasília 23, November 1958; Módulo 12, 1959

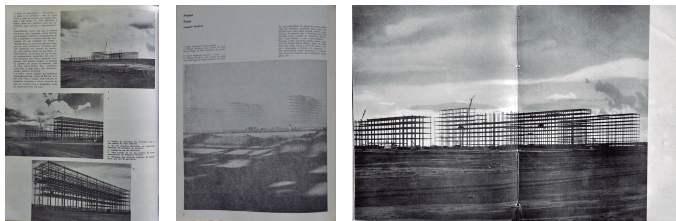


f3_Alvorada Palace
brasília 27, March 1959; Módulo 12, 1959; Módulo 15, October 1959

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Later that year, Gautherot's image of the Alvorada Palace was shown for the first time on the cover of the magazine. Gautherot's artistic composition of the Alvorada Palace, taken from its veranda with a view to the Chapel next to the Palace, emphasised the curved structural form of the building and the spiralled walls of the Chapel. Only a few months later another image of the Palace was used, this time with Gautherot giving prominence to the sculptures by Alfredo Cesschiatti in front of the Palace. The special volume of *brasília* for the inauguration of the capital on 21st of April 1960 again displayed a photograph of the presidential palace. By then the image had been copied numerous times in both *brasília* and *Módulo* by both Gautherot and Fontenelle. It is in fact difficult in retrospect to credit specific images to the correct photographer (**f1-f3**).

Niemeyer modified the curved structural columns of the Alvorada Palace in many other buildings of Brasília such as in the Planalto Palace, the Supreme Court and the Itamaraty Palace. This curved structure therefore became iconic in itself, through the variation and repetition of its form. Niemeyer himself described the structure by saying: "my concern was to find a beautiful clear-cut structure that would define the characteristics of the main buildings –the Palace– strictly so called within the indispensable criteria of simplicity and nobility".

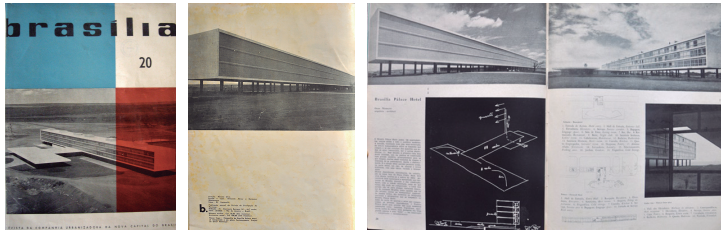


f4. Ministries in construction

brasília 23, November 1958; *brasília* 27, March 1959; *Módulo* 15 October 1959

In the March 1959 volume of *brasília*, the iconic metal structures of the Ministries in construction in a plain field of desert soil were first published. These photographs are still to this day iconic symbols for the making of a new city. The identical buildings on each side of the 'Monumental Axis' do reflect these characteristics of monumentality and power. At the same time, their ghost-like skeleton demonstrates more than any other image the making of a new capital. *Módulo* published a similar photograph by Gautherot in October of that year with workers on the construction site of both the Ministries and the Congress. Typical of Gautherot's photographs, depicting Brazilian life in general, these working conditions were further romanticised in this issue with a poem by Joaquim Cardoso (**f4**).

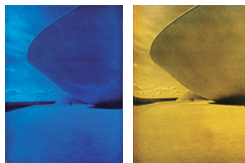
The Brasília Palace Hotel (formerly Hotel de Turismo), was also one of the first building completed (**f5**). Its linear form is in stark contrast to the curved structures of the Palaces and the Congress. Its form represents the more functional early modern buildings. As the construction process of Brasília was overseen by many governmental and administrative figures who frequented the building site, the need to construct a hotel as one of its first buildings was imminent. Together with the Alvorada Palace, the residence of the president, the Brasília Palace Hotel sits outside of the urban master plan by Lucio Costa, which was constructed at around the same time these first buildings would be erected. The linear and functional form of the Brasília Palace Hotel served as a welcome contrast to the curved forms of some of the other buildings in Brasília and further highlighted the diverse talent of Oscar Niemeyer as the main architect of the new capital.



f5_Brasília Palace Hotel

brasília 20, August 1958; Módulo 12, 1959

One of the now most copied images is that of the Congress, which *Módulo* published in a couple of its issues in 1960. Niemeyer accompanied the photographs with texts to discuss the "Form and Function of Architecture", saying that the requested atmosphere that a capital requires was inherent in the dignified monumentality of the Congress. About its curved form he stated: "I am in favour of an almost unlimited plastic freedom, a freedom that is not slavishly subordinate to the reasons of any given technique or of functionalism, but which makes an appeal to the imagination, to things that are new and beautiful, capable of arousing surprise and emotion by their very newness and creativeness, a freedom that provides scope –when desirable– for moods of ecstasy, reverie and poetry". (*Módulo* 21 1960. p.3). The images of the Congress, mostly by Gautherot were also favourably used in publicity campaigns advertising construction materials and their respective companies (**f6**).



f6_National Congress

Módulo 18, June 1960; Módulo 20. December 1960

Fontenelle, who had started out by merely providing photographic evidence as documentation of the construction of Brasília was soon influenced by Gautherot's more artistic images, copying the setting and angles of his photographs. Gautherot's use of the connection between photography and architecture started through his education in architecture. In Sergio Burgi's account of Marcel Gautherot in Brasília, he is being quoted as saying: "From the beginning, the new capital proved to be a challenge and an unprecedented opportunity for Gautherot's sense that there was a fundamental unity between architecture and photography. Where else but in Brasília could he have conducted a fuller demonstration of this idea? A preliminary glimpse of the final result may be seen in the shot of the National Congress at sunrise. In this, as in other images from the series to which it belongs, there is nothing fortuitous about the positioning of the camera; it evinces a vocation for abstraction and pre-visualization of the image, governed by a

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desire to capture the structural design of the architectural grouping. In turn, this is only fully evinced thanks to Gautherot's twofold ability to wait for the best and brightest light and his precise control of film exposure, a combination that ensured a high definition of infinite gradations of light in its interaction with constructed surfaces –designing, covering, or reflecting all the nuances of volume, plane and texture in construction”¹.

The 3000 images produced by Marcel Gautherot during the creation of Brasília were at the same time not all usable to sell the image of a modern city as “the images of the harsh lives of these workers, sequestered in their encampments and ad hoc temporary shelters made of building scrap, were not published during the first phase of Brasília's construction, unlike the supposedly more objective record taken by the official photographer Mario Fontenelle”².

the modern image as producer and product of the modern image

The photographic documents published by the magazines *brasília* and *Módulo* reveal the photograph of the modern building as the main force as well as the vehicle in the production of the modern image. The initial photographs that were used to document the buildings of Brasília were first used to advertise the new city to the Brazilian people as the new capital and a modern city and henceforth became the publicity image of the modern city itself. The photographs thereby played a valid role in creating this city as an embodiment of a modern utopian idea and these photographs have since become, together with the architecture it portrays, icons of modern architecture.

In the 1996 published book *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*³, Beatriz Colomina outlines an immediate link between modern architecture and its representation through photographs, advertisement and mass media in general. She argues that Modernity was created by the image itself rather than the functions and mechanism that go into creating the architecture. The state of the ‘modern’ is therefore a representation and this modern representation goes as far as being produced by the image, and thus the mass media itself, as she explains that Reyner Banham already “noted that the modern movement was the first movement in the history of art based exclusively on ‘photographic evidence’ rather than on personal experience, drawings or conventional books. ...the work of these architects themselves has become known almost always through photography and the printed media”⁴. Whereas modern architecture is generally thought of as merely a high artistic practice in opposition to mass culture, Colomina argues the emerging systems of communication, photography and the media, are the actual producers of the modern image. She argues: “modern architecture does not simply address or exploit mass culture. It is itself, from the beginning, a commodity”⁵. The connection of the image of modernism and modern architecture thus becomes evident as a total symbiosis of the two and a necessity for the creation of the architecture as much as for the marketing of its image. To Colomina architecture is more than just a cultural representation, and photography “outside the logic of ‘realism’”. Rather than representing reality, it produces a new reality⁶ or as Marcel Gautherot is being quoted: ‘photography is architecture’ and “anyone who does not understand architecture will never be able to take a good photograph”⁷.

The concept of media itself derived out of the technical instrumentations gained from World War I. Technologies for communications that were used during the war to transfer information between distant countries were later domesticated and radio and telecommunication became household items. Such was the spread of media objects that the concept of advertisement soon reached the epicentre of the culture of the consumer age. Colomina points out that Roland Barthes already illustrated the parallels between the emergence of photography and the modern movement as he is quoted as saying: “The age of photography corresponds precisely to the irruption of the private into the public, or rather, to the creation of a new social value, which is the publicity of the private: the private is consumed as such, publicly...”. Colomina then concludes that the private has become consumable merchandise”.

This shift from the private to the public was also explained by Guy Debord's definition of a whole *Society of the Spectacle*⁹. His findings, originally published in 1967 were an analysis of the transformation of a whole society seeking such spectacles (such as the construction of a new capital city). Debord starts off his observations by suggesting that "the whole life of those societies in which modern conditions of production prevail presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. All that once was directly lived has become mere representation"⁹. This, of course can be applied to the architectural image as well as the modern building but the evolution of the modernised product had –as he suggests– even more extensive effects. This was evident not only in the modern image but even more so in the consumer product. "Understood in its totality, the spectacle is both the outcome and the goal of the dominant mode of production. It is not something added to the real world –not a decorative element, so to speak. On the contrary, it is the very heart of society's real unreality. In all its specific manifestations –news or propaganda, advertising or the actual consumption of entertainment– the spectacle epitomizes the prevailing model of social life. It is the omnipresent celebration of a choice already made in the sphere of production, and the consummate result of that choice. In form as in content the spectacle serves as total justification for the conditions and aims of the existing system. It further ensures the permanent presence of that justification, for it governs almost all time spent outside the production process itself"¹⁰.

The spectacle also ensures the consistent repetition of a society seeking such spectacles and is therefore fundamentally linked to a society of consumerism. "The spectacle subjects living human beings to its will to the extent that the economy has brought them under its sway. For the spectacle is simply the economic realm developing for itself –at once a faithful mirror held up to the production of things and a distancing objectification of the producers"¹¹. The spectacle becomes a reflection of the impulses of social behaviour as these images, created during the making of Brasília and since being considered iconic, are to this date still copied by advertising campaigns and tourists alike, "as the indispensable packaging for things produced as they are now produced, as a general gloss on the rationality of the system, and as the advanced economic sector directly responsible for the manufacture of an ever-growing mass of image-objects, the spectacle is the chief product of present-day society"¹². The spectacle is also interlinked with the power of the image and thus can be classified as a 'modern' phenomenon. It is the image that we see and then seek towards. The modern image that inherited the promise of a better life is therefore the main force for the spectacle and it is translated into a subconscious desire for this life. The economic industry used this subconscious desire to sell their products and the idea of a modern lifestyle. Guy Debord notes: "The spectacle is capital accumulated to the point where it becomes image"¹³.

The modern image as spectacle is therefore used as a tool of power, a way to manipulate the free will into a desire for the modern, or as Colomina put it: "It is significant that when this same built architectural piece enters the two-dimensional space of the printed page it returns to the realm of ideas. The function of photography is not to reflect, in a mirror image, architecture as it happens to be built. Construction is a significant moment in the process, but by no means its end product"¹⁴. The imagination that accompanies the representation of modern architecture through photography becomes the tool for the photographer as well as the architect to sell their 'product'.

The representation of modern architecture was therefore created through the image that accompanied the modern discourse, as can be seen in the images of Brasília by Mario Fontenelle and Marcel Gautherot. The aesthetic taste of the moment created symbolic value and the modern image is thus a mix between photography and architecture whereas the two subjects require and benefit from one another. The photograph needs architecture to become the means of representation or sometimes even the work of art and architecture needs photography to sell its image to become the product itself. The examples of these two photographers thus make visible how the initial documentation process was used as an advertising image, becoming the work of art and finally a symbol of the modern movement.

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endnotes

1. Burgi, Sergio and Titan, Samuel Jr. *Marcel Gautherot Brasilia*. (São Paulo: Instituto Moreira Salles, 2010) 14ff.
2. Ibid, p. 20.
3. Colomina, Beatriz. *Privacy and Publicity – Modern Architecture as Mass Media*. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1994)
4. Ibid, p. 14.
5. Ibid, p. 195.
6. Ibid, p. 80.
7. Angotti-Salgueiro, Heliana in *O Olho Fotografia: Marcel Gautherot e seu tempo*. São Paulo: Faap, 2007, p. 253 in Burgi, Sergio and Titan, Samuel Jr. *Marcel Gautherot Brasilia*. (São Paulo: Instituto Moreira Salles, 2010) 11.
8. Debord, Guy, *Society of the Spectacle*. (New York: Zone Books, 1994)
9. Ibid, p. 13.
10. Ibid, p. 14.
11. Ibid, p. 17ff.
12. Ibid, p. 17.
13. Ibid, p. 25.
14. Colomina, Beatriz. *Privacy and Publicity – Modern Architecture as Mass Media*. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1994) 114ff.

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